The Church's Unbroken Life in Christ.

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday and
to-day and forever.—Hebrew 13 : 8.

A Farewell Address at the Close of Rectorship.

CHURCH OF ST. JAMES THE LESS,
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A Farewell Address of the Rector

Rev. EDWARD RITCHIE,

CHURCH OF St. JAMES THE LESS.

The author of the inspired Epistle from which I take my text is speaking, it seems most likely, of those who have passed beyond the vail, but the example of whose faith he claims for their successors in the work of God's service, an example declared in their conversation, i. e., their manner of life, spiritually viewed, and given as a model of holy living. This faith and conversation had one end, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever." We may find in these words the continuity of the life in the Church of God as declared in the lives of God's people. Those who have gone before with the sign of faith are the inspirers of the multitudes who are called to follow in their steps. Their associated life in God's Church has become broader and fuller through life's spiritual elevation, and as cities set upon a hill they have become more extended objects of vision. They have become the vanguard of the thousands who follow, in God's army, under the same banner and to the same inspiring strains of the gospel music, under the leadership of Him, who is "the same yesterday, and today and forever," Jesus Christ, our Lord. We wish always to feel that way about God's Church and our life and work in it. It is something in which we all have a common part as well as a personal part. It is a great reality in the world, subject indeed in measure, but only in measure, to the world's conditions. It is something, indeed, which has its outward form and life. It is something which has its time-bound measures. But it is something which is a reality great enough to relatively minimize outward and personal conditions, in view of the greatness of its continuous and abiding mission in the world. We must not lay too much stress upon these earthly conditions, for we are all caught up into a reality which transcends the methods of time.

And yet God expects us to consider the whole bearing of our life in His Church. He expects us to think of the "yesterday" and the "today" as well as the "forever." It is all the story of Jesus Christ and His life who is "the same yesterday and today, and forever."

In this aspect of the matter I may review the thoughts which lie deep in my heart, and are uppermost in my mind tonight. There are things in life which we are continually doing. We are inclined to feel in regard to these a lesser sense of their importance because of their frequent occurrence. Of course we may go much too far in such a view of the matter. But there are things which justly claim their sense of importance because we can do them but once in a lifetime, and so the action has its very special significance. In our sacramental life we find sacraments, whose inherent meaning lies in the fact that they are given for repeated use; and there are others which have in them the "seal" character of that which is impressed once for all beyond the power of being repeated. And a priest, through ordination, has the seal of Holy Orders which cannot be taken from him. The right or opportunity of exercising his priesthood might be removed, but the seal of real power would remain. The conditions and occasions under which priesthood is exercised are quite different. The times when pastoral ties are formed in any given parish, and those ties sundered are, except in very rare cases, times which occur but once. A priest fills out the course of his work in a parish, and through his personal withdrawal or through the Hand of God in death, the pastoral tie is sundered. He is still a priest, though a change has taken place in the conditions under which his priesthood is possessed. Without unduly (in fact only in a very his priesthood is exercised. Without unduly (in fact only in a very guarded way) dwelling upon the personal aspects of the matter, the withdrawal of a priest from his pastoral charge has its great significance both for him and those to whom he has had the privilege and responsibility of ministering. The priest is sent out to his work as a messenger, watchman and steward of our Lord. He is an appointed carer for and seeker after the flock of God. So great a responsibility rests upon him that both in the prospect and the retrospect of so great a work he may well tremble. Dealing with the things of God in the matter of human souls is a great responsibility. Few there are, I suppose, who could speak with St. Paul's confidence of the kind of work which they had done. There are, of course, two sides in the matter of pastoral work. There are two visions of responsibility. The one summons up and interprets the other. They are mutually related and mutually interdependent. Your talents and your responsibilities are those which God takes account of. They are those which none but you can discharge. Each one has of God his own vocation and ministry.

Now, dear people, we stand tonight at the parting of ways. Tonight I am your pastor; tomorrow I shall not be. I am not wishing to speak of this in a strain of personal concern, or to feel that in any sense you will be spiritually losers; for I feel sure you will be in good hands, and that God will have you in His holy keeping. The future will, I feel, be bright before you under your coming leadership, and I shall rejoice to hear of your advance in every good way.

Of the church's life and work we feel, that though

> "Rectors come and Rectors go,
> Her course goes on forever."

Like her Heavenly Lord, the Church, His Bride, is "the same yesterday and today and forever."

You will not, I know, even in your thoughts, forbid me to advance the past, in memory, into the present, that it may re-tell somewhat of its story. The sixteen and one-half years which I have been with you is no inconsiderable period, small as it may seem when measured by the measures of eternity.

You know almost as well as I do of the outer aspects of the history of that period. It has been a time marked by stirring scenes in the world's life, and important events in our parochial life.

Within these sixteen and one-half years occurred the world war, so clear and so sadly clear in the memories of us all. The most of us were spared those strokes of anguish which fell upon some. And yet we were not wholly spared. We remember Hutchinson, Veasey and Brunett. The Lord give unto them eternal rest. And those who fought and were kept free from harm we also deeply honor. The war, the greatest of those which the world has ever known, I suppose, in its involved conditions and deadly carnage was a test of faith to all. No doubt many were driven to earnest prayer by these trying times; yet we may be thankful that, in God's mercy, they are passed. And their lessons have not been lost. Then we well remember the epidemic sickness which in 1918 assumed such formidable proportions, and claimed so many lives, some indeed of our own. Within this period we have seen many wonderful developments in the world of natural discovery. These, important as they are, bear a relatively incidental aspect as they come into comparison with the growth and advance in the Kingdom of God. Here we find no small increase of growth and interest. God's people are probably contributing more toward the growth of His kingdom than before, as the matter is computed on properly proportionate lines. And yet it seems clear that far from full duty is being discharged. In the period of my rectorate it seems likely that there has been a corresponding growth of worldliness in the social world about us in living for the things of this world. This, however, is no discount upon the faithful and unselfish labor in God's cause abundantly and lovingly given. In the sphere of our own parochial life we have seen many material changes. There have been those helps given which should call forth gratitude and a sense of responsibility. The finely executed Bell Tower was finished in 1910 and duly blessed. And in 1916 the new Parish House, the gift of Mrs.

Catherwood, was completed and blessed. I am very thankful, as we all are, to Mr. Samuel T. Wagner, the rector's warden, for the "Parochial History" which he has so carefully compiled and put into usable and permanent form. In our parish life and work we have much to be thankful for, tho not without a measure of regret for much left undone or imperfectly done. Much faithful work has been done by the people and much devotion shown and perseverance given. And yet we must feel that only a part has been done of that which should have been done. For much undone I feel that I must take the blame, and am sure that I am not saying this in any spirit of false modesty or self-depreciation. With progressing years we learn to look at things more naturally and simply and I trust more correctly. We view our failures with more calmness, and with a chastened sense of comfort in the overruling power and love of God. He can make success even when we have seemed to fail, or have failed. And on our weak efforts He can pour of His abundant strength. I am largely forbidden of course to speak of living co-workers in a personal way, though the voice of my mind may tell its story to myself. I know of the faithfulness and earnestness of many who are co-workers in God's cause.

I feel of the departed that the matter of personal commemoration is different, though this also must have its limitations. The late rector's warden, Mr. Robert S. Smith, is remembered by you all with affectionate respect, and I shall always remember his help and co-operation with me in my work, especially the great aid he gave me in organizing our mission services on Queen Lane. His beautiful example in his personal and official life is a fragrant memory. Other very dear faces have passed away during my incumbency — Mrs. Adams, Miss Throckmorton, Mrs. Elizabeth Smith and many others. We may well take up the refrain "Whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today and forever." Our people will remember with gratitude the work done during his short curacy of the Rev. Henry O. Jones, to whom God grant His eternal rest.

It has been a privilege which I think no one would wish to take from us, specially to remember on All Soul's day the faithful departed, and to pray for their perfect consummation and blessing which we help to further by our holy and earnest lives. And while we do this we have the benediction which God gives us through the example of their faith, as we "consider the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever."

The work of Fr. Gorgas, whom we still have near us, in his more extended work with us, you well and gratefully remember. Under Fr. Gorgas' effective superintendence our Sunday School work was most effective, and in all ways he has shown himself and still remains our example and our friend. With his co-operation the work of the Mission on Queen Lane was begun, which has proved itself at least well worth while.

If I have had an ideal which was uppermost, I think it lay in seeking to provide the largest possibility for eucharistic worship on the Lord's Day. In doing this I have not originated any new order; for the parish for many years has stood for this in no small degree; yet it seemed possible to advance in this direction. Under Fr. Jones and myself the service at 9.15 A. M. on Sundays was begun and has continued with practically no intermission. Let me here pay my tribute of honor, regard and thanks for the faithful assistance given us for a considerable period of time by Fr. Osborne. God has called him from us. Fr. Cavanagh has been most effectively helping us. It is an appreciated service which I was unwilling to give up, even when I became single-handed in the care of the services. I believe it has borne good fruit. Another ideal which I have had which at present has only borne partial fruit is the Parish Association. The plan of unity in the branches of parochial work and their sympathetic correlation seems to be a thing which would be helpful and stimulating were it realized in an effective way.

You will, I trust, give the coming rector your full co-operation in such methods as he may adopt for the securing of results in the work of the parish. Within the period of my incumbency occurred the seventy-fifth anniversary of our parochial existence. It was duly celebrated with its memories and hopes stressed. We have had during the period two parochial missions, the latter of which is very fresh in your memories. The work of the mission priests will be remembered with loving gratitude. The finely executed history of the parish puts its salient points of foundation and progress in permanent form for the time to come. Bishop Rhinelander's election and completed episcopate has occurred during the period of my rectorate. He will be affectionately remembered by all, and especially by those upon whom his hands were laid in confirmation. While our interest in missionary giving has developed I trust it may advance to fuller development in years to come. I feel that far too little has been done in this matter. It is my privilege and joy here to speak of a very important element in our services which has been with so much success and effective zeal rendered. I refer to the work of the choir and its leadership. We all know the inspiration which this has given to our services as well as the painstaking effort which has been its underlying force. How thankful we should be to have had continuously for so many years this element of interpreting power for our worship in stately and dignified music. It has been a great privilege to have been permitted to close my active ministry in a parish so full of good church traditions, and among a loyal and kind people who honor me I feel beyond my deserts, and who love me with a love which I would not wish diminished and which I have the satisfaction of reciprocating. We do not so wisely, however, dwell too much on the past, when the future, with its hopes and aims, looms up before us. Under your new rector I predict for you a marked advance. He brings to the work, I am sure, full measures of loyalty to the Church, devotion to duty and power to achieve. He will, I doubt not, lead you wisely and well. You, of course, must bear your part, and the more fully that is done the more opportunity will he have of leading you to successful results. Our great head and leader, Jesus Christ, expects every member of His mystical body to function fully and rightly, and each member should feel his part in the work as a whole. If I have sown any seed which may bear fruit or have done any part to lay foundations which shall endure, then to God be the praise. Where I have failed I trust that my successor may have success, and where I have been only partially successful that he may perfect and complete. Do not forget the claim God makes upon you of allegiance to, and co-operation with him, who represents Him. Some things, I fear, I have not sufficiently accented, for they need accent—Eucharistic Worship, Fasting Communion and Sacramental Confession. I believe in them very fully. We have passed Christmas-tide and are in the season which divides feast from fast, yet one whose life is still radiant with the praise of Him who was manifested for us men and our salvation. And at this "green season" of hope I leave you without those hopes being taken from us. I came to you in a green season, and you made it green for me by your kindness. I was personally unknown to most of you, but you let me know you and I owe you no small debt.

Through the kind and courteous action of the vestry (with which honored body I have had most pleasant connection during my rectorate) I have been elected Rector Emeritus. While this title does not carry with it (as a matter of course) any part whatever in the ordering of the spiritual or other work of the parish, yet it gives me the opportunity of having another link in the chain which will always bind me in feeling and affection to the parish and parishioners of St. James the Less. Many spiritually picturesque scenes of its life will remain vividly clear in my memory; its inspiring early celebrations of the Holy Eucharist on Christmas and Easter; its Confirmations; its Sunday School festivals; the parish picnics, and many others. Of anniversaries, those of the Ladies' Benevolent have always been interesting and helpful, and they have always had the spirit of reality in them. Though I shall not be your pastor beyond today, I shall still feel as one of you. Many whom I have baptized are here before me; many whom I have presented for Confirmation; not a few perhaps whom I have married—many have knelt to receive from me the Bread of Life. How wonderful it all is in memory and in fact—the memory frames the fact; the fact is the reality.

The stately and graceful proportions of this spiritual temple are well imprinted on our mind's eye, and reveal to us a House of God and gate of heaven.

Here the deadness of stone,
Has a life all its own,
Through skill to man given to show:
In arches set square,
On capitals fair,
And crowning the columns below.

Vision of beauty, vision of strength, vision of peace, vision of truth. And then the calm reality of the surrounding churchyard with its sacred dust of bishops, priests and people of God.

"One family we dwell in Him,
One church, above, beneath,
Tho' now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death."

For all of us, dear friends, it is the one great and surprising story of Christ and His Church. All that is lesser is absorbed in this great, eternal theme, "Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, and today and forever." Here is found the story of the Church's unbroken life; here is the message which invites every member to renew (as at special solemn times we may with special power) our allegiance to God's Church and its great Head, our Lord. He is everything to us, as He has been to all who have been "in Him." Spiritually time becomes in Him as a great present of eternal meaning. "The same, yesterday, and today and forever."

"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever."

Christ of our yesterday to us made known,
Who called us at the font to be His own;
In whom our lives have share,
Still has us in His care,
And blesses from His high and holy throne.

The Christ the same today, whose blessings fall,
As we are daily taught life's fuller call;
Blest day of outpoured grace,
And vision of that Face,
Which cheers and helps when fears and doubts appall.

The Christ whose glory shall the years unfold,
In their eternal course which ne'er grows old;
The faith-seen Christ then seen,
In wondrous, glorious, sheen,
By all the gathered in His Heavenly Fold.

Dear people! What words could be better fitted than these to warn us, to comfort us, and to bless us as we remember our calling of God, and that we are continually standing before the gates of eternity? For some specially they sound the note of *warning,* as they must feel that they have not been as true to Jesus as they should have been. Perhaps some here have forgotten the supreme claim which He has a right to make upon their lives for spiritual service in prayer, worship and work. They may have forgotten the obligation of public worship, and sacramental life. He is the same in His claim upon all. In many ways it is possible for all to fail in service; and in serving there is *only one way.* The words are a comfort: for He who "is the same yesterday and today and forever," calls and recalls. They comfort our weakness and cast their blessing upon our true service when given and when renewed.

While I am now voicing my official farewell I am thankful that, personally, I am not called to say farewell (tho my best wishes for your wellfaring are with you). The personal tie in some ways outlasts the official, for it brings us ever before the great reality of our common, regenerated, oneness in Christ. With hearts keyed to the music of His name, let us claim Him as our own, and trust that through His grace we may be kept in His holy keeping until the coming of that day when we shall see and know Him as He is, the "same yesterday, and today and forever." May God have you ever in His holy keeping, in the way of grace which will lead to the way of heavenly joy.